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Distributive trade statistics

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-seventh session,[a] the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Commission a report on the activities undertaken by the United Nations Statistics Division in response to decisions taken by the Commission at its thirty-seventh session in the area of distributive trade statistics. The draft of the revised international recommendations for distributive trade statistics is before the Commission, as a background document, for consideration and adoption.

The Commission may wish to discuss the points for action contained in paragraph 22 of the present report.

[a] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2006, Supplement No. 4* (E/2006/24), chap. I.C., decision 37/102.

* E/CN.3/2008/1.

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Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Statistics Division in the area of distributive trade statistics

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I. Introduction

1. The present report summarizing the activities undertaken by the United Nations Statistics Division in response to the decisions taken by the Statistical Commission at its thirty-seventh session in the area of distributive trade statistics. At its thirty-seventh session, the Statistical Commission endorsed broadly the initiative and strategy of the Statistics Division to revise the existing *International Recommendations on Statistics of the Distributive Trades and Services*.[1] The Commission requested the Statistics Division to submit to it a progress report at its thirty-eighth session for information and revised draft recommendations at its thirty-ninth session for adoption. The Commission further advised that:

(a) The revision process should be carried out in close consultation with national statistical offices in order to reflect fully the specific needs and circumstances of various groups of countries, in general, and the needs of countries with a substantial informal sector, in particular;

(b) The level of detail requested for international reporting should be commensurate with country needs and capacity to compile;

(c) The Statistics Division should review existing international databases in that area of statistics to avoid creating an additional reporting burden on countries and the duplication of work among international organizations;

(d) The Statistics Division should develop practical guidance on the compilation of distributive trade statistics, including a description of good practices;

(e) The Statistics Division should conduct technical assistance activities in that area as a matter of priority.

2. At its thirty-eighth session, the Commission took note of the progress in preparation and the proposed outline of the revised international recommendations for distributive trade statistics.

3. The progress in the revision of the existing recommendations is described in section II of the present report, which sets out an overview of changes in the revised recommendations for distributive trade statistics. A background document, entitled draft International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008 (IRDTS 2008) contains the full text of the revised recommendations endorsed by the United Nations Expert Group on Distributive Trade Statistics at its second meeting. Section IV provides an outline of the implementation programme of the revised recommendations. Points for discussion are contained in section V (para. 22).

II. Progress in the revision of the existing International Recommendations on Statistics of the Distributive Trades and Services

4. The multi-year strategy for updating the *International Recommendations on Statistics of the Distributive Trades and Services*,[1] as endorsed by the Statistical Commission at its thirty-seventh session, includes: (a) obtaining an initial assessment of the general situation in the compilation of distributive trade statistics

[1] Statistical Papers, No. 57 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.75.XVII.9).

by conducting an overview of current country practices; (b) establishing an Expert Group on Distributive Trade Statistics to assist the Statistics Division in the updating process; (c) preparing the provisional draft of the revised recommendations and submitting it to the Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session; (d) preparing a manual on the compilation of distributive trade statistics; (e) developing a United Nations database for storing, processing and disseminating distributive trade statistics; (f) commencing technical assistance activities for developing countries, including conducting training workshops to build up their capability to compile and disseminate distributive trade statistics; and (g) reviewing changes in country practices in 2010 and reporting the findings to the Commission at its forty-first session, to be held in March 2011.

5. A brief description of the revision process which has led to the preparation of the draft International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008 is presented below.

A. Initial assessment of country practices in the compilation of distributive trade statistics

6. In implementing the first component of its strategy, the Statistics Division conducted a worldwide survey of country practices in 2004. The survey results revealed that: (a) countries frequently use different definitions of the scope of distributive trade and of compiled variables, thus making international comparisons of data quite difficult; (b) about 40 per cent of the countries that responded were unable to conduct quarterly/monthly surveys and to compile indices of distributive trade and/or performance indicators. In general, the survey confirmed that distributive trade statistics definitely need revisiting and careful re-examination.

B. United Nations Expert Group on Distributive Trade Statistics

7. In 2005, the Statistics Division established the Expert Group on Distributive Trade Statistics in order to obtain assistance and guidance during the revision of the existing recommendations. The main objectives of the Expert Group were: (a) to provide an assessment of those recommendations in view of the new realities in distributive trade and current country practices in the compilation of the relevant statistics; (b) to contribute to drafting the revised recommendations and to suggest new approaches in data compilation, including the organization and conduct of distributive trade surveys; (c) to review the provisional draft of the revised international recommendations for distributive trade statistics; and (d) to comment on the outline of the future compilers' manual.

8. The first meeting of the Expert Group was held from 22 to 25 August 2005. Its purpose was: (a) to provide an assessment of the existing recommendations; (b) to advise on the areas where the updating of existing and/or development of new recommendations is needed; and (c) to contribute towards such updating/revision. The most important conclusions of the first meeting included: (a) the current *International Recommendations on Statistics of the Distributive Trades and Services*[1] need to be revised in order to reflect new developments in the distributive trade sector, changing data needs, availability of new data sources, data-collection methods and recent revisions of the international recommendations in other areas of

economic statistics; (b) the scope of distributive trade statistics should be defined as including wholesale trade, retail trade and the repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; (c) a standard set of data items for distributive trade statistics, as well as definitions that are consistent with the definitions already approved by the Statistical Commission in related areas (for example, the system of national accounts and labour statistics), should be recommended; (d) advanced data-collection methods, including the extensive use of business register and existing administrative data sources with the aim of reducing costs and the respondent burden, should be promoted; (e) more guidelines on how to cover and measure the activities of small units or unincorporated enterprises should be provided; (f) recommendations regarding the compilation of indices of distributive trade, such as the index of retail trade and the index of wholesale trade, need to be developed. The full text of the conclusions is available in the report on the meeting (available at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/Distributive_trade/distributive_trade.htm).

9. The Expert Group held its second meeting from 16 to 19 July 2007. The main objective of the second meeting was to review, amend and endorse the provisional draft International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008 for its submission to the Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session for adoption. The meeting also advised the Statistics Division on the preparation of two follow-up manuals that will provide practical guidance to compilers of distributive trade statistics. The first manual will focus on the practical implementation of the recommendations as presented in the draft IRDTS 2008, while the second will deal with the compilation of indices of distributive trade, including description of good practices in this area of statistics.

10. During its second meeting, the Expert Group fully agreed on the relevance and content of the provisional draft IRDTS 2008. The Expert Group re-emphasized the need for flexibility in implementing the recommendations and stressed that IRDTS 2008 is not intended to be prescriptive and should be implemented by national statistical offices in a way appropriate to their own circumstances, including the identified user needs, resources, priorities and respondent burden. The Expert Group further concluded that in order to improve the international comparability and to enhance the capacity of developing countries, the draft recommendations should include a chapter on compilation of short-term distributive trade statistics. The inclusion of such a chapter would bridge the gap between annual and infra-annual distributive trade statistics.

11. In order to ensure the statistical coherence between standards on basic economic statistics and between them and other frameworks, such as the system of national accounts and the activity and product classifications, the Expert Group on Distributive Trade Statistics held several joint sessions with the Expert Group on Industrial Statistics during its second meeting. The recommendations and conclusions reached at the joint sessions guaranteed mutual consistency in the treatment of common issues and the alignment of concepts, definitions and terminology used in the draft international recommendations for industrial and distributive trade statistics. The full text of the conclusions is available in the report of the meeting (available at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/Distributive_trade/distributive_trade_2ndmeet.htm).

C. Electronic discussion forum

12. A password-protected website has been created to facilitate communication among members of the Expert Group on Distributive Trade Statistics and the sharing of relevant materials and draft chapters of the revised recommendations. Through the discussion forum, Expert Group members reviewed the draft annotated outline and draft chapters of the international recommendations and provided guidance on a number of conceptual issues, such as the implementation of the top-down method in the case of trade units by taking into account the type of operation characteristics, and the treatment and recording of outsourcing, among others. During its second meeting, the Expert Group recommended keeping the discussion forum alive. The Expert Group members welcomed the existence of such a forum and considered it crucial for the future activities of the Statistics Division in the area of distributive trade statistics, which are particularly important for the drafting of follow-up manuals that provide practical guidance to compilers of data. It is expected that the website will be further developed and extended to increasingly become a knowledge-based platform for the compilation and dissemination of distributive trade statistics.

D. Global country consultations on the international recommendations for distributive trade statistics

13. In accordance with the recommendation of the Statistical Commission that the revision process be carried out in close consultation with national statistical offices in order to reflect fully the specific needs and circumstances of various groups of countries, the Statistics Division conducted global consultations on the modalities and content of the revised international recommendations for distributive trade statistics as described below.

14. To initiate the revision process, the Statistics Division, in cooperation with the members of the Expert Group for Distributive Trade Statistics, prepared the draft annotated outline of the recommendations, which was made available to all countries on 11 October 2006. Respondents gave their overwhelming support to the Statistics Division for its initiative and welcomed the coordinated manner in which the revision was carried out, its transparency and the involvement of all interested parties in the process. They found the draft outline to be well organized and comprehensive in terms of structure and content, and that it provided an adequate treatment of all aspects of distributive trade statistics. A number of more specific suggestions were also made that contributed to better formulation of the future recommendations.

15. The Statistics Division prepared the provisional draft of the recommendations and sent them for a peer review to members of the Expert Group. The comments of the latter were incorporated, and an amended version of the draft was posted on the Statistics Division website for a worldwide consultation. The consultation was conducted in June and July 2007. Responses were received from 40 countries and 3 international organizations.

16. All country comments were consolidated in a separate document which, together with the amended version of the provisional draft IRDTS 2008, was reviewed by the Expert Group at its second meeting, held in New York from 16 to

19 July 2007. Respondents were highly appreciative of the work accomplished by the Statistics Division with regard to the revision of the existing recommendations. The document as a whole, and particular recommendations related to the collection, compilation and dissemination of distributive trade statistics, received strong support. Countries considered the revised recommendations to be a useful guide for producers and users of statistical information. Since the achievement of harmonization and international comparability of data on distributive trade statistics and the implementation of an integrated approach to data collection are among the main objectives of the revision, a particular advantage of IRDTS 2008 is that the concepts, definitions and methodological approaches in it are fully harmonized with other existing statistical standards. Countries are looking forward to receiving practical guidance for the implementation of the recommendations included in IRDTS 2008.

17. During its second meeting, the Expert Group advised that countries should be given another opportunity to provide their final comments on the provisional draft IRDTS 2008 before the document was submitted for official editing and adoption by the Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session in February 2008. The global consultation was undertaken simultaneously for both revised sets of international recommendations — industrial and distributive trade statistics — in November and December 2007. The outcomes and country comments received during the global country consultation were reviewed and incorporated in the draft International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008, presented as a background document to the Statistical Commission.

III. Overview of changes in the revised recommendations

18. The draft of the International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008 was prepared by Statistics Division following the conclusion of the first and second meetings of the Expert Group on Distributive Trade Statistics. The draft also incorporates the inputs received from national statistical offices and international organizations during global country consultations on its content that were conducted from October 2006 to December 2007. The preliminary version of the draft was endorsed by the Expert Group at its second meeting.

19. The draft IRDTS 2008 were developed within the context of an integrated approach to the compilation of basic economic statistics, and have been fully harmonized with the recommendations of other recently updated international statistical standards, such as the International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008 (IRIS 2008), which is being updated in parallel with IRDTS 2008 and the System of National Accounts, 2008 (2008 SNA), the International Standard Industrial Classification of all Economic Activities, Revision 4 (ISIC, Rev.4), and the Central Product Classification (CPC) Version 2. The draft recommendations cover all aspects of the collection, compilation and dissemination of distributive trade statistics. They provide a more comprehensive methodological framework, as they encompass both annual and short-term statistics. They have also been considerably expanded, with the inclusion of new topics dealing with data sources and data compilation methods, approaches to data quality assessment, metadata and dissemination policies. In brief, the main differences between the revised recommendations and the *International Recommendations on Statistics of the Distributive Trades and Services*[1] can be described as follows:

(a) *Scope*. The revised recommendations define the scope of distributive trade statistics as statistics reflecting characteristics and activities of the units belonging to the distributive trade sector of an economy. The scope of the distributive trade sector is defined in terms of ISIC, Rev.4, as comprising all resident entities recognized as statistical units and classifiable in section G as wholesale and retail trade and repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, irrespective of their size, form of economic and legal organization or ownership. Distributive trade activities carried out by entities not classified in Section G of ISIC, Rev.4, are not covered by distributive trade statistics. The previous recommendations defined the distributive trades and services sector as comprising all establishments that are engaged primarily in wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels (ISIC, Rev.2, Major Division 6) and selected services (parts of ISIC, Rev.2, Divisions 83, 94 and 95). According to ISIC, Rev.4, the units primarily engaged in the provision of hotel and restaurant services and in the repair of personal and household goods are excluded from the scope of the distributive trade sector and are now classified, respectively, in Section I, "Accommodation and food service activities" and in Division 95 of Section S "Other service activities";

(b) *Statistical units*. The revised version of the recommendations contains a more comprehensive and detailed discussion of statistical units in the collection of distributive trade statistics, including the treatment of statistical units of the informal sector and the mapping of selected entities specific to distributive trade, such as retail chains, department stores, franchises and marketplaces, among others. It also includes enhanced guidelines on the delineation and proper classification of trade units in conjunction with principles set out in 2008 SNA and ISIC, Rev.4;

(c) *Data items*. Both the list of data items and their definitions are reviewed and updated. In particular, the revenue and expenditure items are presented in more detail, e-commerce sales are separately identified, and the value of turnover is presented by product group. Lists of data items and their numbering in IRDTS 2008 and IRIS 2008 are fully harmonized. Although the specific circumstances of developing countries are recognized in many instances throughout the revised draft recommendations, no separate set of data items is recommended for them. However, it is recognized that national statistical offices of developing countries may wish to work out the necessary modifications and adaptations of the common list of data items;

(d) *Performance indicators*. The revised recommendations reflect the increased interest in the assessment of overall performance of the distributive trade sector. Along with the compilation of basic data items, the recommendations identify a set of indicators for monitoring the profitability, productivity and efficiency of the distributive trade sector as a whole or some of its divisions. Such indicators were not part of the previous version of the recommendations;

(e) *Data sources and data compilation methods*. The description of data sources and data compilation methods is significantly expanded, for example, by the inclusion of discussion on various types of statistical and administrative data sources; the business register and its use as a frame for statistical surveys; and the data compilation methods implemented by statistical offices to bring the collected data on distributive trade statistics to the level of intended statistical output. An outline of a data-collection strategy for different segments of the economy based on an integrated approach is also presented;

(f) *Short-term distributive trade statistics*. The chapter on this subject provides guidance on some of the most important issues related to short-term distributive trade statistics, such as the compilation of indices of distributive trade, their time-series character and the necessity of seasonal adjustments and reconciliation of short-term with annual data (benchmarking);

(g) *Data quality and metadata*. Issues of data quality and metadata were not part of the previous recommendations. In keeping with the increased importance of the enhancement of data quality, the revised recommendations contain guidance on the main dimensions of quality that should be taken into account in developing quality assessment frameworks. A limited set of key indicators for measuring the quality of distributive trade statistics is suggested. Recommendations are also provided for the development and dissemination of adequate metadata on distributive trade statistics;

(h) *Data dissemination*. Recommendations on data dissemination are updated and harmonized with similar recommendations applicable in other areas of economic statistics. Further guidance is provided regarding the confidentiality protection and development of a sound revision policy;

(i) *Harmonization of IRDTS 2008 with 2008 SNA*. The harmonization of IRDTS 2008 and 2008 SNA is strengthened in terms of implementing the same underlying methodological concepts and definitions. Changes in the 2008 SNA relevant to distributive trade statistics include valuation of trade output at basic prices; treatment of ancillary units; capitalization or research and development expenditures and the expenditures on large databases made by the units; inclusion of employee stock options as part of the compensation of employees; and terminology and classification of non-financial assets.

IV. Outline of the implementation programme

20. Following their adoption by the Statistical Commission, the revised International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008 will be submitted for official editing. An electronic copy of the edited version will be distributed to countries and posted on the website of the Statistics Division. In order to promote and assist countries in the implementation of the IRDTS 2008, the Statistics Division plans to organize a number of technical assistance activities for developing countries, such as training workshops. The development of a Statistics Division database and the dissemination of distributive trade statistics as well as the collection of national practices on distributive trade statistics are also envisaged as part of the implementation programme.

21. During its thirty-seventh session, the Statistical Commission advised the Statistics Division to develop practical guidance on the compilation of distributive trade statistics, including a description of good practices. During its second meeting, the Expert Group on Distributive Trade Statistics also identified the need to go beyond the recommendations for distributive trade statistics contained in the IRDTS 2008. In compliance with the Commission's advice and with the aim of improving the international comparability and enhancing capacities of developing countries, the Statistics Division plans to prepare two follow-up manuals to complement IRDTS 2008: Distributive Trade Statistics: Compilers Manual and Indices of Distributive Trade Statistics: A Handbook of Good Practice. To initiate the drafting

process, the Statistics Division prepared draft annotated outlines and sent them to members of the Expert Group for comments.

V. Points for discussion

22. The Statistical Commission is requested to:

(a) Review and adopt the revised International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008;

(b) Provide guidance for the implementation of the revised recommendations.

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Industrial statistics

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report was prepared at the request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-eighth session. The report contains a description of activities undertaken in response to the requests of the Commission. The draft of the *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008* is provided as a conference room paper for consideration and adoption by the Commission. Points for discussion by the Commission are contained in paragraph 27.

* E/CN.3/2008/1.

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I. Introduction

1. At its thirty-seventh session, held from 7 to 10 March 2006, the Statistical Commission, endorsed the work carried out by the United Nations Statistics Division for the revision of the *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics*[1] and the manual on *Index Numbers of Industrial Production, 1950*[2] and agreed to the general recommendations set out in the report of the programme reviewer for industrial statistics.[3] At its thirty-eighth session, held from 27 February to 2 March 2007, the Commission took note of the report of the Secretary-General on industrial statistics, which included a proposed outline of the revised *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics*.[4]

II. Activities carried out in response to the requests of the Commission

A. Expert Group on Industrial Statistics

2. The United Nations Statistics Division established an Expert Group on Industrial Statistics in 2005 to assist and provide guidance in reviewing the work programme on industrial statistics and in particular to provide guidance for the revision of the *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics*, last revised in 1983, the revision of the manual on *Index Numbers of Industrial Production*, last revised in 1950, and the revision of the United Nations list of industrial products, last revised in 1973.

3. The Expert Group met again from 16 to 19 July 2007 in New York. The main purpose of that meeting was to review the revised draft of the *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008*, provide additional guidance on a number of issues that had emerged during the drafting of the revised version between 2005 and 2007 and amend the document for submission to the Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session.

4. A major goal of the meeting of the Expert Group on Industrial Statistics was to ensure consistency between the revised *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008* and the *International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008*, which were discussed at a parallel meeting of the Expert Group on Distributive Trade Statistics. In order to ensure the mutual consistency in the treatment of common issues, as well as the alignment of concepts, definitions and terminology used in the draft international recommendations for industrial and distributive trade statistics, several joint sessions of the two expert groups were held during this period. These harmonization efforts responded to the Commission's request to consider the work on industrial statistics in the context of an integrated approach to economic statistics.

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[1] Statistical Papers, No. 48, Rev.1 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.83.XVII.8).

[2] Studies in Methods, No. 1 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.50.XVII.4).

[3] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2006, Supplement No. 4* (E/2006/24), chap. I, sect. C, decision 37/101.

[4] Ibid., *2007, Supplement No. 4* (E/2007/24), chap. I, sect. B, decision 38/115.

5. The Expert Group on Industrial Statistics also reviewed the progress of work in the revision of the manual on *Index Numbers of Industrial Production* and endorsed the outline of the manual and the timetable of work as proposed by the United Nations Statistics Division.

6. The complete text of the recommendation and conclusions of the Expert Group on Industrial Statistics meeting is available on the website of the Division, at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/industry/meetings/eg2007/ac129-4.pdf.

B. Revision of the *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics*

1. Revision process

7. The first proposals for revision of the *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics* were discussed in the meeting of the Expert Group on Industrial Statistics, held from 19 to 23 September 2005. Subsequently, the United Nations Statistics Division prepared a draft annotated outline of the revised international recommendations based on the recommendations of that meeting and sent it for a peer review to members of the Expert Group. Suggestions received from members were taken into account in drafting the revised international recommendations.

8. The draft *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008* document was considered by the Expert Group on Industrial Statistics at its second meeting, held from 16 to 19 July 2007, with a view to reviewing, amending and endorsing the draft for submission to the Statistical Commission for adoption at its thirty-ninth session. As already mentioned above, several joint sessions of the Expert Group on Industrial Statistics and the Expert Group on Distributive Trade Statistics were held in order to ensure the mutual consistency in the treatment of common issues, alignment of concepts, definitions and terminology used in the draft international recommendations for industrial and distributive trade statistics. Recommendations made by the Expert Group on Industrial Statistics for the revision of the draft *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008* are included in the report of the 2007 meeting (available from http://unstats.un.org/unsd/industry/meetings/eg2007/ac129-4.pdf).

9. In order to solicit participation of the global statistical community and promote transparency in formulating the revised recommendations, comments of the national statistical offices were invited on the draft *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008*. This global consultation was undertaken simultaneously for the revised versions of both the international recommendations for industrial statistics and for distributive trade statistics during the period of November/December 2007. Comments received through this global consultation were reviewed and incorporated in the draft document for the *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008*, which is presented to the Commission as a conference room paper.

10. Through the comprehensive review process, the draft *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008* has been developed within the context of an integrated approach to compilation of basic economic statistics and is fully harmonized with the recommendations of other international statistical standards such as the *International Recommendations for Distributive Trade*

Statistics 2008 (updated in parallel with the draft *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008*), the *System of National Accounts, 1993*, Revision 1 (SNA), the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities, Revision 4 (ISIC), and the Central Product Classification, Version 2. The revised recommendations are also consistent and harmonized, to the extent possible, with international statistical standards issued by other international organizations and inter-agency task forces, such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, in respect of measurement of non-observed economy and data and metadata reporting and presentation; Eurostat, in respect of statistical units, the International Labour Organization, with regard to International Classification of Status in Employment; and the International Monetary Fund, in respect of treatment of multiterritory enterprises.

2. Overview of changes in the revised recommendations

11. The draft *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008* is an agreed intermediate output framework of a coherent set of internationally agreed principles, concepts and definitions of data items to be collected and published for the measurement of industrial activity.

12. The draft *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008* is organized into two parts. Part I corresponds in scope to the previous edition of the international recommendations of 1983,[3] and covers the internationally agreed recommendations for statistical units, including their characteristics and data items to be used for industrial statistics. That part of the publication should be adopted by the Commission as the international recommendations for industrial statistics. Part II of the draft *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008* goes beyond the scope of the 1983 recommendations by also providing supplementary guidance on performance indicators, data sources, compilation methods and data collection strategy, data quality and dissemination of industrial statistics. That part of the publication provides guidance on the implementation of the international recommendations contained in part I.

13. The main changes in the revised recommendations relate to:

(a) Revisions of the 1993 SNA that warranted changes relevant for industrial statistics, including:

(i) Treatment of goods sent abroad for processing;

(ii) Additional elements for the measure of compensation of employees, such as "employee stock options";

(iii) Recognition of units providing ancillary services as a separate establishment in some specific circumstances;

(iv) Classification and terminology of assets;

(v) Capitalization of database development;

(vi) Capitalization of research and development expenditures, and the like;

(b) The broadening of the scope of the economic activities covered by the recommendations as compared to the international recommendations of 1983, since the activities of sewerage, waste collection and remediation have been added in line with the scope of section E in ISIC, Revision 4;

(c) The inclusion of aspects of globalization of the industrial production process (in terms of outsourcing) and the use of electronic commerce;

(d) The use of total value added (national accounts value added) instead of "census value added" in the context of industrial statistics;

(e) The change in valuation of industrial output to basic prices in accordance with valuation principles recommended by the *1993 SNA*[5] and applied in business accounting;

(f) The expansion of the link between the economy and the environment by extending the coverage of data items to include the use of natural resources such as energy, water and minerals, as well as the generation of solid waste, wastewater and by-products.

C. Revision of the manual on *Index Numbers of Industrial Production*

14. The revision of the manual on *Index Numbers of Industrial Production* has progressed according to the previously adopted schedule. A detailed outline of the manual was discussed and approved by the Expert Group on Industrial Statistics in July 2007. The Expert Group on Industrial Statistics also agreed to the proposed timeline for the further work on the manual.

15. The approved outline of the manual covers the following chapters:

I. Introduction

II. Fundamental concepts, including relationship to SNA

III. Infrastructure, including statistical units and classifications

IV. Sources and methods, including variables, data sources and aggregation levels

V. Index compilation, including types of indices, transformation of data, weighting, compilation procedures, additional compilation issues such as re-weighting, linking and re-referencing the index, introduction of new products, benchmarking, as well as quality assessment

VI. Presentation and dissemination

VII. Variables, deflators and sources by industry

16. In 2007, the United Nations Statistics Division also carried out a worldwide survey of country practices in the collection and compilation of volume indices. The information obtained from that questionnaire was used to:

(a) Provide input for the best practices section (in chap. VII of the above outline) of the revised manual on *Index Numbers of Industrial Production*;

(b) Produce a separate publication on country practices for the collection and compilation of volume indices.

17. According to the schedule adopted by the Expert Group on Industrial Statistics, the first complete draft of the manual will be circulated to the Expert

[5] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.94.XVII.4.

Group for comment in the first quarter of 2008. It is expected that the manual will be presented to the Statistical Commission for approval at its meeting in 2009.

18. The separate publication on country practices outlines methods and practices, by country and industry, for the compilation of an index of industrial production. Drafting of the publication is almost complete and the final text is expected to be available by mid-2008.

D. Ongoing activities in the industrial statistics work programme of the United Nations Statistics Division

19. The United Nations Statistics Division continues to carry out a number of ongoing activities in the area of industrial statistics, namely:

(a) The data collection on industrial commodity production continues to be an important element of the work of the Division. After introducing a revised list of industrial products in the 2004 industrial commodity statistics questionnaire, the new 2005 publication of the *Industrial Commodity Production Statistics Yearbook* will be the first to feature data on production of a new list of about 600 commodities, not only in quantity terms, but also in monetary value of production;

(b) The collection of index numbers of industrial production continues on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis, with individual and aggregated indices being published in a number of publications of the Division and, through data-sharing agreements, in publications of other United Nations system agencies;

(c) The industrial statistics website of the Division is being developed into a central portal for information on industrial statistics, which now also includes, through the UN-data project, online access to industrial statistics data.

III. Future work

20. Based on the recommendations of the Expert Group on Industrial Statistics, the United Nations Statistics Division will undertake initiatives to support countries in their efforts to produce comprehensive and comparable industrial statistics and to promote industrial statistics worldwide. As first steps in the implementation of the international recommendations, two main activities are planned: (a) the conduct of regional workshops to familiarize countries with the changes in the international recommendations for industrial statistics (and later on the manual on index numbers of industrial production); and (b) the development of a knowledge base on industrial statistics that can be consulted by countries and other users of industrial statistics.

21. The Division will also continue to carry out elements of its work programme as described in paragraph 19 above and will work on improving the distribution of available data and the integration of historical data and metadata information in these systems.

A. Workshops on industrial statistics

22. As part of the efforts to promote the revised international recommendations for industrial statistics, the United Nations Statistics Division plans to organize a number of training workshops to provide training and capacity-building in industrial statistics to developing countries and to help them to implement the *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008*. These workshops will serve as starting points for more comprehensive programmes to assist countries and will be developed into training activities on more detailed aspects of the industrial statistics work programme and coupled with individual country assistance. The Division will continue to collaborate with the regional commissions and the secretariat of the East Asia Expert Meeting on Manufacturing Statistics on such workshops.

B. Knowledge-based platform on basic economic statistics

23. The Expert Group on Industrial Statistics, at its meeting in July 2007, discussed the need for developing a knowledge-based platform on country practices for basic economic statistics as a vital tool in supporting countries in the collection, compilation and dissemination of economic statistics.

24. It was agreed that such a knowledge base would be immensely useful especially to developing countries as a source of reference and experience sharing on all aspects of basic economic statistics, from planning and execution of surveys or obtaining data through other forms of data collection, to data compilation and dissemination.

25. The knowledge-based platform should ultimately cover all aspects of basic economic statistics and the following list of topics has been suggested as a starting point:

(a) Needs and uses (relevance), including government, business and other needs and uses;

(b) Planning and organization, including legislative requirements, advisory committees and dissemination and promotion programmes;

(c) Management and budgeting, including timetables, budgeting, progress reporting systems and quality control;

(d) Questionnaire design and testing, including principles of design, instruction for respondents and wording (using business accounting terminology);

(e) Collection of data, including selection of resources (survey vs. administrative data), enumeration plans and delineation of collection processes (field enumeration, mail out, treatment of large enterprises);

(f) Data processing, including validation, editing and imputation, coding and warehousing;

(g) Sampling techniques, including for large enterprises, small (household) enterprises and the informal sector;

(h) Creation and maintenance of business registers;

(i) Creation and maintenance of area frames;

(j) Data quality frameworks.

26. The United Nations Statistics Division will develop a prototype of such a knowledge-based platform and make it available for testing in 2008. As a first step, already available information on the subject from international and regional organizations will be used to set up the prototype, which will then be supplemented with national information. While the prototype will initially focus on industrial statistics, it is planned that the knowledge-based platform will ultimately cover other domains of basic economic statistics. Cooperation with other organizations and other contributors will be explored as the project progresses.

IV. Points for discussion

27. **The Statistical Commission may wish to express its views on the following questions:**

(a) **Does the Commission agree to adopt part I of the draft *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008*, as the international recommendations for industrial statistics, to endorse part II as supplementary guidance and encourage the implementation of the *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008* in countries?**

(b) **Does the Commission wish to comment on the proposed implementation of the *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008* through regional capacity-building workshops and the development of a knowledge-based platform?**

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International merchandise trade statistics

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted to the Statistical Commission in compliance with its decision taken at its thirty-eighth session.** The report elaborates the need for the new revision of the Commission's recommendations for international merchandise trade statistics, outlines the United Nations Statistics Division strategy with respect to the organization of the revision process, describes actions undertaken and provides a summary of its action plan for 2008-2011. Points for discussion by the Commission are contained in paragraph 28 of the present report.

* E/CN.3/2008/1.

** See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2007, Supplement No. 4* (E/2007/24), chap I.A.

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I. Introduction

1. The Statistical Commission session took note[1] at its thirty-seventh session of the report of the Task Force on International Merchandise Trade Statistics (E/CN.3/2006/25), in which the Task Force had informed the Commission that the United Nations Statistics Division would conduct a comprehensive review of country practices in compilation and reporting of international merchandise trade statistics in order to assess the compliance with the current recommendations, to evaluate the scope of the necessary revisions to the existing recommendations, and to develop an action plan and submit it to the Commission at its thirty-ninth session.

2. The survey of national compilation and dissemination practices in international merchandise trade statistics was conducted in 2006. The country responses confirmed that there was a high degree of compliance with a number of key recommendations. At the same time, it became apparent that some recommendations had to be updated and additional recommendations might be needed.

3. Section II of the report elaborates the need for a further revision of the recommendations in light of various developments relevant to trade statistics and responses of countries to the questionnaire on their practices in compilation and dissemination of those statistics. Section III outlines the United Nations Statistics Division strategy for the organization of the revision process and describes activities undertaken in this direction in 2005-2007. Section IV contains points for discussion by the Commission.

II. Need for a further revision of the Commission's recommendations for international merchandise trade statistics

A. Summary of the main reasons for the proposed revision

4. The current recommendations for international merchandise trade statistics were adopted by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-ninth session in 1997 and published in *International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions*.[2] To assist countries in the implementation of these recommendations, the publication entitled *International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Compilers Manual*[3] was prepared and issued by the Statistics Division in 2004. Both publications were promoted by the Statistics Division and other agencies members of the Task Force on International Merchandise Trade Statistics[4] and used in a series of training workshops for trade statisticians of developing and transitional countries.

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[1] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2006, Supplement No. 4* (E/2006/24), chap. I.C, decision 37/114.

[2] Studies in Methods, No. 52, Rev.2 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XVII.16).

[3] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.XVII.17.

[4] The Task Force is an inter-agency body and consists of representatives of the following organizations: Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (Statistics Division, Macroeconomics Division), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization, International Trade Centre,

5. These efforts helped to harmonize national methodologies and enhance countries' capabilities to compile internationally comparable trade statistics. This contributed to a noticeable improvement in international reporting and availability of trade statistics for users (see room document entitled "Availability of international merchandise trade statistics: UN Comtrade from 1996 to 2006" (ESA-STAT-AC-137-8). However, with time it became apparent that the next cycle of review and updating of the recommendations was needed.

6. The third revision of recommendations for international merchandise trade statistics (*International Merchandise Trade Statistics*, Rev.3) has become necessary, inter alia, in view of:

(a) Changes in the way international merchandise trade is conducted, as reflected, for example, in increasing globalization of the production and distribution processes, expansion of intra-firm trade, transactions with bundled goods and services components;

(b) Changes in the legal environment such as adoption by the Council of the World Customs Organization of the Revised Kyoto Convention (International Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures (as amended)) and new legal/administrative measures for increased security or further simplification of customs formalities;

(c) Changes in related statistical frameworks, in particular the *1993 System of National Accounts*[5] and the *Balance of Payments Manual*;

(d) Changes in user needs, including increased demand for more detailed and timely data for market access negotiations, trade policy purposes, market research by the business community and economic analysis (for example, linking industry and trade data);

(e) Need for further clarification of some existing concepts and improvement of the overall readability.

7. The need for a new revision was discussed by the Task Force on International Merchandise Trade Statistics which supported the Statistics Division initiative to begin the revision process and agreed to actively participate in it.

B. Main areas for revision and updating

8. To obtain the necessary input for the revision process, a survey of country practices in compilation and dissemination of trade statistics was conducted in 2006. A detailed questionnaire was prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division, reviewed by other members of the Task Force and sent out jointly by the Statistics Division, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Trade Organization to countries in June 2006. The main purpose of the questionnaire was to take stock of the countries' compliance with the recommendations contained in revision 2 of *International Merchandise Trade Statistics* and the compilation guidelines outlined in the *Compilers Manual*.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Statistical Office of the European Communities and World Customs Organization.

[5] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.94.XVII.4.

9. The detailed report on the survey results will be made available on the United Nations Statistics Division website by the end of 2007. Selected areas where the current recommendations might need a revision and updating in view of the country responses are described below.

10. *General definition of coverage*. The survey revealed, inter alia, that countries overwhelmingly base their trade statistics on the principle of the physical movement of goods that add to or subtract from the stock of material resources of countries, as recommended. The change-of-ownership criterion is used only for certain categories of goods, mostly when customs records of cross-border movement of goods are not available. The responses indicated that different practices are followed by countries in this respect. In view of the importance of the change of ownership for the balance-of-payments statistics and national accounts, a more systematic review of the range of cases where the change-of-ownership criterion might be applied has to be undertaken and the relevant recommendations should be updated.

11. *Goods for processing*. Goods for processing are recommended for inclusion in trade statistics and 83.5 per cent of countries comply with this recommendation. Most countries also confirmed that they can separately identify a subset of these goods — goods declared for the inward and outward processing procedures. However, countries' ability to record separately other kinds of goods for processing needs to be studied further, especially taking into account the future requirement of excluding all goods for processing where no change of ownership takes place from the goods part of the balance of payments. In this context, additional recommendations to separately identify other categories of goods for processing might be needed.

12. *Goods crossing borders as a result of transactions between parent corporations and their direct investment enterprises (affiliates/branches)*. All developed countries follow the recommendation to include this category of goods in their trade statistics. For developing countries, it proved to be a more difficult task, as 18 per cent of them reported their non-compliance. It follows that the relevant recommendations might need some updating in order to improve the situation. This issue merits special attention in view of the intensifying globalization of the world economy and concerns with respect to accuracy of valuation of such flows.

13. *Trade system*. The survey revealed that the use of the recommended general trade system is difficult for many countries, especially for those that abolished customs controls at their borders. Recognizing that statistics compiled on the basis of the general trade system are essential not only for tracing international movements of goods, but also for compilation of the balance of payments and national accounts, the recommendation on trade systems has to be reviewed. For example, the updated recommendation might include reference to use of the non-customs sources so as to ensure better capturing of goods not entering customs territory. The boundary of the statistical territory that defines the general system of trade needs to be clarified as well (for example, by listing the territorial elements that have to be covered by countries that are applying this system as well as by indicating which territorial elements may not be covered).

14. *Valuation*. Country responses to the questions on valuation confirm that the recommendation to use the cost, insurance and freight (CIF)-type valuation for imported goods and the free on board (FOB)-type valuation for exported goods is very well implemented (93.4 per cent of respondents use the CIF-type valuation for

imported goods and 96.7 per cent use the FOB-type valuation for exported goods). It is very encouraging that the recommendation to compile data on international freight and insurance is being followed by 40.5 per cent of countries, while 10 years ago only 29.7 per cent of countries were compiling such data. In addition, a number of countries confirmed that they compile and publish the FOB-type valued imports data.

15. The experience of countries able to compile the FOB-valued imports is of great interest as such data are needed for various types of economic analysis as well as for the reconciliation of international merchandise trade statistics with the balance-of-payments statistics and statistics on international trade in services. In this context, additional recommendations might be needed to improve the availability of data needed for the compilation the FOB-type valued imports data, at least at the aggregated level.

16. *Partner country*. The recommendation of Revision 2 of *International Merchandise Trade Statistics* on partner-country attributions are well followed, with 90.9 per cent of countries compiling the country of origin for imports and 91.7 per cent compiling the country of last known destination for exports. It should be noted, however, that in the determination of country of origin, the provisions of the Kyoto Convention are followed by 81.5 per cent of developed countries and by only 59.5 per cent of developing countries. This raises the question of whether the revised recommendations should address the issue of partner attribution in more detail in addition to the promotion of the revised version of the Convention. The recommendation to use the country of last known destination for exports should also be reviewed in order to assess whether it can be made more operational.

17. The use of the country of consignment as an additional partner attribution was reported by 46.3 per cent of countries for imports and by only 19.8 per cent for exports. As availability of this kind of partner data is essential for various kinds of economic analysis and for trade statistics reconciliation studies, the current recommendation on the use of the country of consignment might be strengthened.

18. *Sources of data and data compilation strategies*. The survey of country practices confirmed that, for most countries, customs declarations remain the main source of data. This is especially pertinent for developing countries, as 97.9 per cent of them confirmed this to be the case. However, over the last decade, developed countries were supplementing customs declarations with other sources of data more and more. For example, 59.3 per cent of developed countries use administrative records associated with taxation and 51.9 per cent of them use enterprise surveys. For other countries, the corresponding proportions are only 21.3 per cent and 19.1 per cent, respectively.

19. The trend towards a more active use of the non-customs sources should be carefully examined in order to see whether appropriate international recommendations are needed to ensure the best possible data comparability and promotion of good practices. In this context, some additional recommendations on inter-agency cooperation might be appropriate as well.

20. *Data quality and metadata*. Data quality, as well as the compilation and dissemination of metadata, was not sufficiently covered in Revision 2 of *International Merchandise Trade Statistics*. In the view of the United Nations Statistics Division, this area needs more attention in the revised version of the

recommendations. Such topics as indicators of quality, content and structure of metadata have to be discussed to determine what kind of guidance might be needed, taking into account recommendations on these topics approved by the Commission with respect to other areas of statistics.

21. *Dissemination policies*. Revision 2 of *International Merchandise Trade Statistics* has a separate chapter (VII) providing recommendations on several aspects of dissemination, which are implemented by a majority of countries. Timeliness of trade data, in most cases, is well within guidelines for economic statistics (for example, monthly trade data become available within 43 days in 77 per cent of countries that responded to the questionnaire and annual data become available within seven months in 81.7 per cent of countries that responded). Building on already accumulated good practices, the revised recommendations might be made more concrete and better harmonized with similar recommendations in other areas of statistics. Special attention should be paid to drafting some additional recommendations on the dissemination of metadata and international reporting.

III. Strategy of the Statistics Division for the organization of the revision process

22. In 2007, the Statistics Division developed a multi-year strategy for updating the Commission's recommendations on international merchandise trade statistics. This strategy includes:

(a) Obtaining an initial assessment of the general situation in trade statistics by conducting an overview of current country practices;

(b) Establishing an Expert Group on International Merchandise Trade Statistics to assist in the updating process (see annex for the terms of reference);

(c) Preparing the provisional draft of the revised recommendations and submitting it to the Statistical Commission for consideration and adoption at its forty-first session in March 2010;

(d) Preparing of an updated manual on the compilation of international merchandise trade statistics by 2011;

(e) Further developing UN Comtrade (United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database) to ensure that it will be able to store, process and disseminate international merchandise trade statistics compiled in accordance with the revised recommendations (2011);

(f) Commencing technical assistance activities for developing countries, including conducting training workshops to build up their capability to compile and disseminate international merchandise trade statistics in compliance with the revised recommendations.

23. Some elements of this strategy are already implemented. As described above, a survey of country practices was conducted. To ensure active country involvement in the revision process and to obtain their endorsement of the future draft *Recommendations for International Merchandise Trade Statistics, Revision 3*, the United Nations Statistics Division established the United Nations Expert Group on International Merchandise Trade Statistics. The first meeting of the Expert Group is

scheduled to be held from 3 to 6 December 2007 in New York. A number of international organizations active in production and/or use of international merchandise trade statistics are also invited to participate in the work of the Expert Group and to provide their comments and suggestions. The main task of the first meeting of the Expert Group will be to identify areas where revised or new recommendations are needed and establish a list of issues for a worldwide consultation and to provide guidance on the scope and content of the future recommendations.

24. Based on the conclusions of the Expert Group and taking into account comments and suggestions of the Task Force, the Statistics Division will prepare a list of issues for the first round of worldwide consultations and will conduct the round in May-June 2008. During July-October 2008, the Statistics Division will prepare a report summarizing results of the consultation and in November 2008 will organize a virtual session of the Expert Group to assess how to incorporate those results into the first version of the provisional draft of Revision 3 of the *Recommendations*. Both the summary report on the worldwide consultation and the report of the virtual Expert Group meeting will be made available to the Task Force for comments.

25. By the end of March 2009, the Statistics Division will have prepared the first version of the provisional draft of Revision 3 of the *Recommendations* and will organize a worldwide consultation thereon during April-May 2009. The Statistics Division will prepare a report summarizing the results of the consultation and will make it available to both the Expert Group and the Task Force. Using the received comments and suggestions, the Statistics Division will then prepare a second version of the provisional draft (August 2009) and will submit it to the Expert Group at its second meeting for review and endorsement. The second Expert Group meeting is tentatively scheduled for September/October 2009. After incorporation of the comments of the Expert Group and the Task Force, the Statistics Division will submit the final draft of Revision 3 of the *Recommendations* to the Statistical Commission for consideration and adoption (December 2009).

26. If adopted by the Commission, the original English version of Revision 3 of the *Recommendations* will be made available on the Statistics Division website and countries will be notified accordingly. Subsequently, Revision 3 will be published in all official United Nations languages.

27. Beginning in the second half of 2010, the Statistics Division will commence its technical assistance activities to help countries in the implementation of Revision 3 of the *Recommendations*. This programme will include the development of training materials and preparation of the updated version of *International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Compilers Manual*.

IV. Points for discussion

28. **The Statistical Commission may wish:**

(a) To endorse the United Nations Statistics Division initiative to revise the existing recommendations for international merchandise trade statistics and to request that the draft revised recommendations be submitted to the Commission for adoption at its forty-first session in 2010;

(b) To advise the Statistics Division that the draft revised recommendations should provide an updated conceptual framework of international merchandise trade statistics and necessary guidance on data compilation and data dissemination in the context of an integrated approach to economic statistics.

Annex

Terms of reference of the United Nations Expert Group on International Merchandise Trade Statistics

1. The United Nations Expert Group on International Merchandise Trade Statistics has been established to:

(a) Ensure active country involvement in the revision of the recommendations for international merchandise trade statistics;

(b) Review and endorse the draft revised recommendations;

(c) Provide guidance on the implementation of the revised recommendations after their adoption by the Statistical Commission.

2. The United Nations Expert Group on International Merchandise Trade Statistics will be convened by the United Nations Statistics Division.

3. The United Nations Statistics Division, in its capacity as the convener of the United Nations Expert Group on International Merchandise Trade Statistics, will submit to the Statistical Commission periodic progress reports on the revision process and the implementation of the revised recommendations.